

Peking story (American prisoners in China) - correspondence, letters and ca...

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The Hammarskjöld mission

As this issue of AMERICA goes to press, the most to be said of the Hammarskjöld mission to Peiping is that the UN Secretary General alone is in a position to appraise the possibilities for the release of the American PW's and to determine what conditions, if any, the Chinese Communists would insist upon as their price. Mr. Hammarskjöld is not talking until his return to UN headquarters. Yet the wording of the brief communiqué sent out from Peiping, with its announcement that the talks were "useful," gives ground for hope. That hope is further strengthened by the apparent cordiality which surrounded Mr. Hammarskjöld's talks with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. The pressure of Indian public opinion, reportedly on our side despite the cool reception accorded the Secretary General during his stopover in New Delhi, may work in favor of the PW's. The recent release by the Russians of two American prisoners and the promise on Jan. 11 to release a third may be a Kremlin hint that Chou En-lai would do well to follow suit. The crux of the problem lies, of course, in the conditions the Chinese Communists may demand in return for the release of the prisoners. We cannot submit to a deal which would grant Red China a seat in the UN. Nor can we sacrifice Formosa to the Peiping regime. A trade, however, for the 35 Chinese students in the United States who have been denied exit permits to return to China is a possible basis for future discussions. If such a package deal is in the offing, let it include all U. S. citizens being held in China. There are other American PW's held by the Reds, as well as a number of American missionaries who have been languishing in Chinese jails for several years. We may never again have the chance to negotiate directly for their release.

Message on foreign trade

The President's Jan. 10 message on foreign economic policy is substantially the same as the one which the Republican-controlled 83rd Congress received so coldly last March. It incorporates the mildly liberal recommendations of the Randall Commission. Informed Catholics will not, of course, confuse the President's recommendations for reducing tariffs and simplifying customs procedures with the "free trade" proposals which the Holy Father criticized in his Christmas message. The Pope was referring to current efforts in a few countries to revive the discredited liberal economics of the so-called Manchester School. What President Eisenhower has in mind is continuing the series of "moderate, gradual and reciprocal" tariff cuts which began with the enactment of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act in the early 1930's. Specifically, he wants that law, which expires on June 30, to be renewed for a period of three years. He also wants to cut some of the red tape which makes it needlessly difficult for foreign goods to pass through U. S. customs houses. Though adoption of these proposals will mean increasingly sharp competition, and

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some real hardship, for relatively small sectors of U. S. business, the alternative seems much worse. Unless this country takes the lead in expanding the trade of the free world, we must resign ourselves, not only to continued large loans and grants to our allies, but to watching them increase their trade with Soviet Russia, Red China and the rest of the Communist bloc. That explains why the President, in sending his program to Congress, insisted that lowering trade barriers is "essential for the security of the United States and the rest of the world."

Spanish unions under Catholic fire

From Las Palmas in the Spanish-owned Canary Islands there recently came a blast at Spain's state-controlled labor unions from Bishop Antonio Pildain y Zapiain. In a vigorous pastoral the Bishop expressed the fear that the disgust with which no small number of Spanish workers view the labor movement might be transferred to the Catholic Church. Apparently an effort is made in Spain to hold up the existing trade unions as the "full realization of the social doctrine of the Church." Embittered workers who accept that falsehood might, in the bishop's opinion, suffer a total disillusionment ending in communism and anarchy. Bishop Pildain left no possible doubt about his own view of the Spanish unions. Bluntly he attacked them on two grounds; they were neither Catholic nor true trade unions. The unions could not be called Catholic because they were in conflict with social doctrines of the Church. They lacked a proper autonomy and independence. Even as trade unions the present organizations defeat the legitimate rights of the workers and deprive them of the means to improve their lot. Bishop Pildain's courageous stand is closely in line with the direct appeal of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions to General Franco in 1951. That little-known document, available in the April 1952 *Catholic Mind*, gives a masterly summary of Catholic principles on trade-unionism and affirms that "the time has come in Spain to put trade-union life on a sound foundation of healthy freedom."

Religious illiteracy in American youth

Visitors from abroad are impressed by America's crowded churches and fervent devotions. But chaplains in the Armed Services have made the unpleasant

discovery that 35 per cent of our American youth are religious illiterates. The bearing of these figures was driven home in a recent nation-wide radio talk over the NCCM "Christian in Action" program by the Rev. (Brig. Gen.) Terence P. Finnegan, deputy chief of Air Force chaplains. "This ignorance, this unpreparedness," said Fr. Finnegan, "is part of the strength of an enemy" who is waging a spiritual as well as military war. Chaplain Finnegan cited statistics from a survey made some months ago by Air Force priests. Analyzing these, Catholics cannot find much ground for complacency. Of a total of 4,823 young men whom the priests interviewed, "all claiming to be Catholic," only 61 per cent credited themselves with attending Mass even three times a month. In another survey, covering 1,000 Catholic recruits, 38 per cent admitted they had not received Holy Communion in at least a year's time. Despite the harsh handicaps of military life, the chaplains restored these youths to practically total religious practice. Why are parents failing in the same duty during the seventeen years their children are at home?

. . . illiterate views on the Mother of God

Quite a bit of religious illiteracy seems to prevail among our non-Catholic fellow citizens concerning Catholic teaching on the Blessed Virgin. Protestant misconceptions in her regard can stand analysis, and recent tentative investigation yielded some significant results. Speaking in St. Louis at the sixth annual meeting of the Mariological Society of America, Rev. Kenneth Dougherty, S.A., of Washington, D. C., reported that out of 100 Protestant ministers responding to a questionnaire on the Virgin Mary, 64 denied that she was the Mother of God. Fr. Dougherty emphasized that the replies were not to be regarded as a statistical sample of all Protestant ministers in the United States, but said the study did offer some insight into contemporary Protestant thought on the Virgin Mary. The most common reason for denying the divine maternity was the belief that Catholics divinize our Lady. Implicit in the majority of negative replies was the view of the ancient Nestorian heretics, that there are two persons in Christ and Mary is the mother only of Christ the man. Several ministers also indicated the notion that Christ was not divine. Fr. Dougherty may

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be right in his suggestion that the present rash of attacks on the Blessed Virgin among the more militant sects may stimulate Protestants to study the real Catholic position.

Drama critic on Noah and the ark

It would be unreasonable to expect a drama critic such as Brooks Atkinson of the New York *Times* to be deeply versed in biblical scholarship. It is not unreasonable, however, to expect such a critic to exercise great care and restraint when he has to speak on matters that touch on the Bible and its interpretation. Reviewing Clifford Odets' *The Flowering Peach* in the *Times* for Jan. 9, Mr. Atkinson seemed to go out of his way to brush aside the possibility that the story of Noah in the Book of Genesis has any truth in it. Mr. Odets' play deals with the building of the ark, the flood, the voyage and the final disembarkation of the people saved from the flood, and is played, says Mr. Atkinson, with a spirit of reverence and tenderness. (Theophilus Lewis' review appears on p. 434 of this issue.) Mr. Atkinson is not quite so reverent, for he refers constantly throughout his column to "the legend of Noah" as a "Bible fable," "an ancient fable." There is no doubt, of course, that fables have grown up around the facts given in Genesis, and even that those fables are propagated by some unwise types of Catholic catechetical teaching. Such, for instance, is the clearly impossible interpretation that all the animals of the whole earth were housed in pairs in the ark. "A series of unheard-of miracles" would have been required to bring this about, says *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (Nelson, p. 190). But that Noah was chosen and preserved by God to continue the lineage by which Christ would come for the redemption of the world is the firm, devout and not at all legendary belief of millions which Mr. Atkinson so airily dismisses. In the dismissal he not only offends the religious convictions of Catholics and thousands of non-Catholics as well, but he intrudes into dramatic criticism a judgment which he has no competence to make.

Belated Army report on Dr. Peress

The 25-page step-by-step narrative, sent to Congress on Jan. 6, 1954, of the way the Army handled the Peress case mostly reaffirmed what was already public knowledge. The 13-page appendix, it is true, listed 31 new names of Army personnel involved in processing the case, in addition to the names of 30 officers secretly supplied to the Senate Government Operations Subcommittee during the Army-McCarthy hearings last spring. The commissioning of the Brooklyn dentist as an Army captain in October, 1952 was done without his having been required to fill out a loyalty questionnaire before he was inducted under the doctors' draft act enacted by the 83rd Congress. As Secretary of the Army Stevens explained last March, this law had been passed and implemented during the emergency created by the Korean conflict, which

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DIVINE HELP IS SOUGHT

Senate Chaplain Has Special Prayer at Session

WASHINGTON, Jan. 24 (AP)—The Rev. Frederick Brown Harris, Senate chaplain, in a prayer opening today's Senate session to hear President Eisenhower's message on Formosa, appealed for Divine help in the face of "fanatical foes to whom human life is nothing."

He said in part:

"Create in us clean hearts and right spirits as we face foes which have not Thee in awe, fanatical foes to whom human life is nothing because their gaze is no higher than the earth; whose pledged word is worthless because expediency is their only god; who, for their own ends, callously traffic in normal human affections and family ties. To protect this earth which could be so fair, our God, bless America as she throws her might across the path of so godless a pestilence. May our strength, moral and material, be a factor through Thy will in bringing to pass a just peace in our time, O Lord. Amen."